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THE  
SLEEPING SENTINEL.

BY

FRANCIS DE HAES JANVIER.

AUTHOR OF "THE SKELETON MONK," "THE VOYAGE OF LIFE,"  
"THE PALACE OF THE CÆSARS," AND OTHER POEMS.

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PHILADELPHIA:

T. B. PETERSON & BROTHERS,  
306 CHESTNUT STREET.

PRICE 10 CENTS.



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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

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THE incidents here woven into verse relate to William Scott, a young soldier from the State of Vermont, who, while on duty as a sentinel at night, fell asleep, and, having been condemned to die, was pardoned by the President. They form a brief record of his humble life at home and in the field, and of his glorious death in defence of the Union.

This Poem was first read on Monday, January 19th, 1863, by Mr. James E. Murdoch, the celebrated elocutionist, to a select circle at the Executive Mansion, in the presence of the President and Mrs. Lincoln. On the evening of the same day he read it in the Senate Chamber of the United States, which was specially appropriated for the purpose,—the President and Mrs. Lincoln being again present, together with one of the

largest and most distinguished audiences ever assembled in Washington. It was presented on this occasion anonymously, and produced a profound sensation.

On the evening of February 5th, 1863, Mr. Murdoch read it, with a similar result, at the American Academy of Music, in Philadelphia, to more than three thousand persons, and then announced the name of the author. He has also read it, with the same success, in Baltimore, Albany, Boston, and other cities.

It is now published, in compliance with a general desire for its circulation.



*"The quality of mercy is not strain'd;  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,  
Upon the place beneath : it is twice bless'd ;  
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes :  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest ; it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown :  
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty,  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings ;  
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,  
It is an attribute to God himself ;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice."*

SHAKSPEARE.



## THE SLEEPING SENTINEL.

---

'Twas in the sultry summer-time, as War's red  
records show,

When patriot armies rose to meet a fratricidal  
foe—

When, from the North, and East, and West, like  
the upheaving sea,

Swept forth Columbia's souls, to make our country  
truly free.

Within a prison's dismal walls, where shadows  
veiled decay—

In fetters, on a heap of straw, a youthful soldier  
lay:

Heart-broken, hopeless, and forlorn, with short and  
feverish breath,  
He waited but the appointed hour to die a culprit's  
death.

Yet, but a few brief weeks before, untroubled with  
a care,  
He roamed at will, and freely drew his native  
mountain air—  
Where sparkling streams leap mossy rocks, from  
many a woodland font,  
And waving elms, and grassy slopes, give beauty  
to Vermont!

Where, dwelling in an humble cot, a tiller of the  
soil,  
Encircled by a mother's love, he shared a father's  
toil—  
Till, borne upon the wailing winds, his suffering  
country's cry  
Fired his young heart with fervent zeal, for her to  
live or die.

Then left he all:—a few fond tears, by firmness  
half concealed,

A blessing, and a parting prayer, and he was in  
the field—

The field of strife, whose dewes are blood, whose  
breezes War's hot breath,

Whose fruits are garnered in the grave, whose  
husbandman is Death!

Without a murmur, he endured a service new and  
hard;

But, wearied with a toilsome march, it chanced one  
night, on guard,

He sank, exhausted, at his post, and the gray  
morning found

His prostrate form—a sentinel, asleep, upon the  
ground!

So, in the silence of the night, aweary, on the  
sod,

Sank the disciples, watching near the suffering Son  
of God;—

Yet, Jesus, with compassion moved, beheld their  
heavy eyes,  
And, though betrayed to ruthless foes, forgiving,  
bade them rise!

But God is love,—and finite minds can faintly  
comprehend  
How gentle Mercy, in His rule, may with stern  
Justice blend;  
And this poor soldier, seized and bound, found  
none to justify,  
While War's inexorable law decreed that he must  
die.

---

'Twas night.—In a secluded room, with measured  
tread, and slow,  
A statesman of commanding mien, paced gravely  
to and fro.

Oppressed, he pondered on a land by civil discord  
rent;

On brothers armed in deadly strife:—it was the  
President!

The woes of thirty millions filled his burdened  
heart with grief;

Embattled hosts, on land and sea, acknowledged him  
their chief;

And yet, amid the din of war, he heard the plaint-  
ive cry

Of that poor soldier, as he lay in prison, doomed  
to die!



'Twas morning.—On a tented field, and through  
the heated haze,

Flashed back, from lines of burnished arms, the  
sun's effulgent blaze;

While, from a sombre prison-house, seen slowly to  
emerge,  
A sad procession, o'er the sward, moved to a muffled  
dirge.

And in the midst, with faltering step, and pale and  
anxious face,  
In manacles, between two guards, a soldier had his  
place.  
A youth—led out to die;—and yet, it was not death,  
but shame,  
That smote his gallant heart with dread, and shook  
his manly frame!

Still on, before the marshalled ranks, the train  
pursued its way  
Up to the designated spot, whereon a coffin  
lay—  
His coffin! And, with reeling brain, despairing—  
desolate—  
He took his station by its side, abandoned to his  
fate!



Then came across his wavering sight strange  
pictures in the air:—

He saw his distant mountain home; he saw his  
parents there;

He saw them bowed with hopeless grief, through  
fast-declining years;

He saw a nameless grave; and then, the vision  
closed—in tears!

Yet, once again. In double file, advancing, then,  
he saw

Twelve comrades, sternly set apart to execute the  
law—

But saw no more:—his senses swam—deep dark-  
ness settled round—

And, shuddering, he awaited now the fatal volley's  
sound!

Then suddenly was heard the noise of steeds and  
wheels approach,—

And, rolling through a cloud of dust, appeared a  
stately coach.

On, past the guards, and through the field, its  
    rapid course was bent,  
Till, halting, 'mid the lines was seen the nation's  
    President!

He came to save that stricken soul, now waking  
    from despair;  
And from a thousand voices rose a shout which  
    rent the air!  
The pardoned soldier understood the tones of  
    jubilee,  
And, bounding from his fetters, blessed the hand  
    that made him free!

---

'Twas Spring.—Within a verdant vale, where  
    Warwick's crystal tide  
Reflected, o'er its peaceful breast, fair fields on  
    either side—

Where birds and flowers combined to cheer a  
sylvan solitude—

Two threatening armies, face to face, in fierce  
defiance stood !

Two threatening armies ! One invoked by injured  
Liberty—

Which bore above its patriot ranks the Symbol of  
the Free ;

And one, a rebel horde, beneath a flaunting flag  
of bars,

A fragment, torn by traitorous hands, from Free-  
dom's Stripes and Stars !

A sudden burst of smoke and flame, from many a  
thundering gun,

Proclaimed, along the echoing hills, the conflict had  
begun ;

While shot and shell, athwart the stream with  
fiendish fury sped,

To strew among the living lines, the dying and the  
dead !

Then, louder than the roaring storm, pealed forth  
the stern command,  
“Charge ! soldiers, charge !” and, at the word, with  
shouts, a fearless band,  
Two hundred heroes from Vermont, rushed onward,  
through the flood,  
And upward, o’er the rising ground, they marked  
their way in blood !

The smitten foe before them fled, in terror, from  
his post—  
While, unsustained, two hundred stood, to battle  
with a host !  
Then, turning, as the rallying ranks, with murder-  
ous fire, replied,  
They bore the fallen o’er the field, and through the  
purple tide !

The fallen ! And the first who fell in that unequal  
strife,  
Was he whom Mercy sped to save when Justice  
claimed his life—

The pardoned soldier! And, while yet the conflict  
raged around—

While yet his life-blood ebbed away through every  
gaping wound—

While yet his voice grew tremulous, and death  
bedimmed his eye—

He called his comrades to attest, he had not feared  
to die!

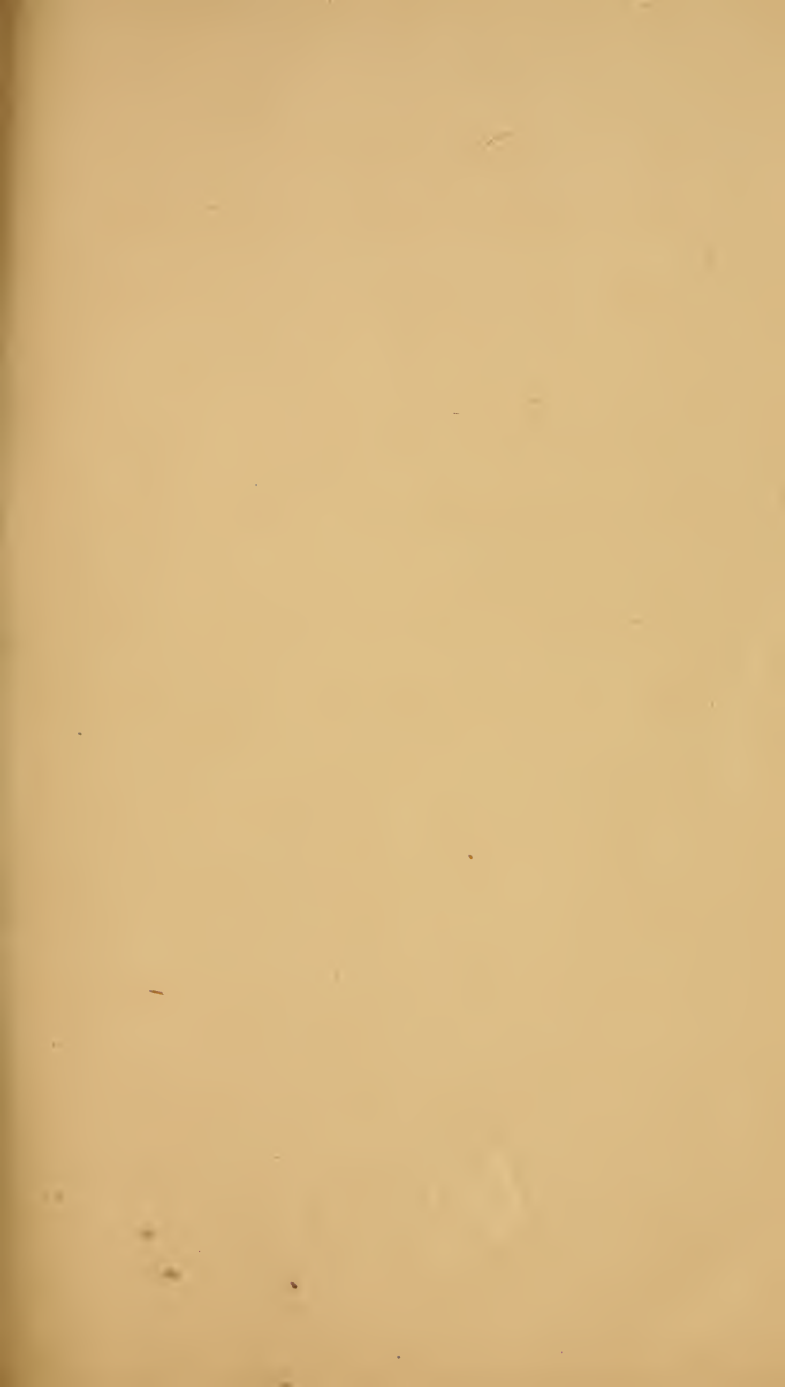
And, in his last expiring breath, a prayer to heaven  
was sent—

That God, with His unfailing grace, would bless  
our President!

THE END.



















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